

**STATEMENT OF  
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**BEFORE THE  
SENATE COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE  
HEARING ON RAIL SECURITY**

**November 1, 2001**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Edward Wytkind. I am the Executive Director of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD), which consists of 33 affiliated unions across the entire transportation industry, including the 12 rail unions that make up our Rail Labor Division.<sup>1</sup> We appreciate this opportunity to appear before you on behalf of transportation workers and, specifically, to bring to this Committee the perspective of rail employees across the nation, including the 20,000 dedicated men and women who operate, maintain and build Amtrak's national passenger rail system.

First, Mr. Chairman, let me take this opportunity to thank you for your leadership on the broader issue of transportation security. Since the tragic events of September 11, the security and vulnerability of our nation's transportation system has received much attention, and rightfully so. Transportation labor appreciates this committee's efforts to address security

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<sup>1</sup>As part of our 33 member organization, the following unions belong to our Rail Labor Division: American Train Dispatchers Department; Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers; Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees; Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen; Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union; International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers; International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers; International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers; National Conference of Firemen & Oilers/SEIU; Sheet Metal Workers International Association; Transportation • Communications International Union; and Transport Workers Union of America.

issues across all the modes of transportation and we are pleased to be part of the deliberation today about rail security and the future of our rail system.

As we move forward as a nation to respond forcefully to the horrific terrorist attacks carried out through our transportation system, we believe that now is the time to address not only critical security enhancements, but the nation's economic needs in the aftermath of September 11. As part of that effort we must dedicate ourselves to rehabilitating and expanding the nation's transportation system to prevent future dislocations to our economy and security.

We believe that several of the principles embodied in S. 1530, the Rail Advancement and Infrastructure Law of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (RAIL-21), are important steps in that direction. The leaders of transportation labor who serve as members of our Executive Committee also believe that it is imperative to include robust transportation investments in any stimulus package passed by the Senate (see attached policy statement).

Mr. Chairman, transportation labor and the building and construction trades unions have worked with your staff to offer input on RAIL-21 and we want to continue that dialogue to advance a bill that both ensures that workers are treated fairly and provides important investments in rail infrastructure and security. We hope that we can continue to work together during the committee process and as this bill moves to the Senate floor to address issues that are of importance to rail workers including the need to protect their jobs and rights, and their retirement security.

RAIL-21 represents not only an important investment in Amtrak as we know it today, but also in the Amtrak of tomorrow which we envision as a highly integrated system of high speed rail transportation. We also endorse the concept of increasing the authorizations for direct loans, loan guarantees and matching grants as long as appropriate prevailing wage laws, retirement security laws and rail worker protections are applied accordingly. Access to such funding will allow for rail security enhancements, high speed rail development, new technology and upgrades at Amtrak and on freight lines and the acquisition of rolling stock. Overall, we will work tirelessly to ensure adequate long-term investments in America's rail needs, but in a manner that upholds the values and rights of the working men and women who form the backbone of the system.

I should also add that we applaud the bipartisan efforts of both you, Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member Senator McCain, for reporting out of this committee an emergency security package for Amtrak. It is our understanding that legislation could be included as part of a port security package as early as this week. We believe the federal investments in system-wide security upgrades and critical capital improvements for Amtrak are essential initial elements in security enhancements in our national surface transportation system. We must not permit Amtrak's

well documented security vulnerabilities to go unchecked a day longer.

Mr. Chairman, let me speak to the provisions in your bill that directly deal with our nation's passenger rail carrier. As we witnessed in the days and weeks after September 11, Amtrak played an indispensable role in filling the void left behind by the grounding of all air operations. And once the airlines resumed operations, Amtrak continued to provide vital transportation services as travelers returned to flying slowly in light of well publicized aviation security risks. In the end, despite its precarious financial state, Amtrak stepped up to the challenge by adding more cars and service, honoring stranded airline passengers' tickets, and stretching its resources to implement new security systems throughout its network.

Amtrak has always been an integral part of our transportation system. Never has that been so clear as it is now. However, Amtrak is at a crossroads. As this committee well knows, we ask much of our passenger rail system. It must be all things to all people, yet we do not provide it with the resources it needs just to survive. For too long, the debate in this town about Amtrak has been about the passenger carrier's survival. The fact is that Amtrak has been forced to struggle with inadequate and unreliable resources, forcing it to direct its attention to survival rather than improvement and expansion.

We've all seen the results of under investment in Amtrak: delayed maintenance, deferred procurement of trains and equipment, eliminated jobs, cuts in wages and declines in quality of service. For the employees of Amtrak, this has meant fewer jobs in a less desirable environment with wages well below those paid to workers in the commuter and freight sectors. However, Amtrak employees have remained dedicated to the promise of a brighter future for Amtrak and today continue to form the backbone of this national passenger rail operation.

Improvements in Amtrak, indeed the continued viability of Amtrak itself, would not be but for the consistent dedication of Amtrak's 20,000 employees. Year after year, Amtrak employees have taken the brunt of Amtrak's financial hardships. As a result of the sacrifices Amtrak workers have made in the form of real wage and benefit concessions, Amtrak has continued to capture a significant percentage of revenue from the fare box. Yet, many Amtrak workers remain the lowest paid in the industry. And if Amtrak is to prosper as a viable transportation option, it is critical that its workers be treated fairly not only by management, but by policymakers and others involved with passenger rail service. Workers and their unions must be seen as partners in the goal of providing safe, dependable national passenger rail service.

We have long supported a balanced federal transportation investment policy that provides federal assistance to all modes of transportation. That is why transportation unions in every sector have joined together with their building trades union counterparts to push for investment in mass transit, highway, Amtrak, aviation, port and maritime programs. In other words,

transportation labor has been out front, year after year, working with Congress on a bipartisan basis to make the case for expanded investments in the nation's transportation needs.

That is one reason why Congress has successfully escalated the pace of transportation investment in recent years, culminating in enactment of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21) and the Aviation Investment and Reform Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (AIR-21). These landmark transportation bills made significant down payments in meeting America's transit, highway and aviation needs. At the same time, these record investments have served as a reminder that our passenger rail system is not receiving realistic financing levels that match the nation's growing expectations for Amtrak as a truly national passenger railroad.

That is why we commend you, Mr. Chairman, for your commitment to change the tone of the debate over passenger rail. We appreciate your leadership in providing Amtrak with the resources it needs, in expanding investment opportunities for high speed rail and in ending the charade called operational "self-sufficiency." We are especially pleased that RAIL-21 eliminates Amtrak's operating self-sufficiency requirement. This artificially imposed mandate for financial self-sufficiency threatens to derail Amtrak's recent progress. Operational self-sufficiency is the wrong answer for Amtrak.

Since its inception, Amtrak has fulfilled an important passenger service need. It is, therefore, in the public interest to ensure that Amtrak has the resources it needs to remain a reliable and sustainable part of the nation's multi-modal national transportation network. Yet Amtrak continues to carry out a specific congressional mandate to serve the nation's passenger rail needs but must do so with a budget that falls well short of meeting its needs. We applaud the provisions in RAIL-21 that reject the idea of a subsidy-free Amtrak, and we maintain that public capital funding of Amtrak should remain a long-term, national priority consistent with the nation's broader transportation priorities which we have long supported.

We strongly endorse the emergency security authorization for Amtrak provided in RAIL-21. This \$3.2 billion infusion will enable Amtrak to immediately increase security by adding new security personnel, surveillance capabilities, fencing and lighting, and by accelerating long overdue improvements to century-old tunnels on the Northeast Corridor and essential capacity enhancements throughout the entire system. While we believe that emergency spending for Amtrak is not only warranted but essential, we also urge this committee to commit in the long-term the resources needed for Amtrak to thrive into the future.

Mr. Chairman, if we are serious about maintaining America's status as the world's leader in transportation, we must tap into the potential of Amtrak and our entire rail system. This underachieving sector of our transportation system must be allowed to achieve great things at a time of great need for our country. Through these critically important investments in the security of rail and, specifically, Amtrak, we will not only address in a meaningful way the

security vulnerabilities existing today in our surface transportation system, but in the long-term we will enhance the safety and viability of our national transportation system at a time of tremendous need.

We appreciate your efforts on RAIL-21, and we look forward to working with you to advance the principles embodied in this legislation to create a better Amtrak and a safer more secure workplace for America's rail workers.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.